

Statement on Terrorist Attacks in Istanbul, Turkey

November 15, 2003

I condemn in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attacks today in Istanbul, where Turkey's diverse religious communities of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian believers have flourished together for centuries. The focus of these attacks on Turkey's Jewish community, in Istanbul's synagogues where men, women, and children gathered to worship God, remind us that

our enemy in the war against terror is without conscience or faith. Turkey has suffered terrible losses from terrorism for decades, and the United States stands resolutely with Turkey in the global war on terrorism. On behalf of the American people, I express our condolences to the families of the victims, to Turkey's Jewish community, and to all the people of the Turkish Republic.

Statement on the Announcement of a Bipartisan Agreement on Medicare Legislation

November 15, 2003

The bipartisan Medicare agreement announced today by leaders in Congress represents a significant achievement in our Nation's efforts to provide affordable prescription drug coverage for our seniors. Seniors have waited a long time for help in paying for prescription drugs, and I am pleased that we are now on the verge of providing

them with the help they need and the health care choices they deserve. This bipartisan agreement is the most significant improvement in senior health care coverage in nearly 40 years. I applaud the hard work and the leadership from both sides of the aisle, and I urge the Congress to pass this legislation soon so I can sign it into law.

Remarks on Arrival From Camp David, Maryland, and an Exchange With Reporters

November 16, 2003

The President. Thank you. Today I spent some time in prayer for our service men and women who are in harm's way. I prayed for their families. I prayed for those who are still in harm's way, whether it be American troops or coalition troops.

The sacrifice that our folks are making in Iraq will serve our Nation's interests in the short term and long term. It's best to defeat the terrorists in Iraq so we don't have to defeat them here. As well a free and stable Iraq, in the heart of a part of

the world where there is frustration and anger, where the recruiters of hatred are able to find terrorists—a free Iraq will be a transforming event. And I appreciate the families who are making the sacrifices along with our troops.

As well in Iraq, it was a tough week, but we made progress toward a sovereign and free Iraq. The Iraqi Governing Council has laid out a timetable for the transfer of sovereignty. We're pleased with that timetable. We think it makes sense. On

the one hand, the politics is moving on; on the other hand, we're going to stay tough and deal with the terrorists.

I also talked to Prime Minister Erdogan over the weekend, expressed our deep condolences for the senseless death caused by bombings in Turkey. He assured me that he would fight the terrorists and bring the terrorists to justice. I told him we would help, and we're grateful. But it's just a reminder that the war on terror takes place on different fronts.

At home, I am pleased with the progress made on the energy bill and on Medicare. I want to thank the leaders in the House and the Senate for coming together on two important pieces of legislation. On Medicare, it looks like there's agreement in principle to provide our seniors with a modern Medicare plan, and that's very positive news. I urge the Members of the House and the Senate to take a look at it, vote it, and get it to my desk as soon as possible. And I'm pleased that we're finally developing a national energy plan. So we're making good progress on the domestic front here at home.

Let me answer a couple of questions.

Saddam Hussein Audiotape

Q. Can you comment on the latest tape, reportedly from Saddam Hussein, that's being aired now?

The President. I haven't seen the specifics. I suspect it's the same old stuff. You know, it's propaganda. We're not leaving until the job is done, pure and simple. A free and peaceful Iraq will be a historic event. And I'm sure he would like to see us leave, if, in fact, it's his voice. And I know that elements of the Ba'athist Party, those who used to torture, maim, and kill in order to stay in power, would like to see us leave. We will do our job.

Randy [Randall Mikkelsen, Reuters].

Helicopter Crash in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, what information do you have about the chopper crash—

The President. No more than you have, but it's sad. It's a sad day when we lose life. It doesn't matter whether it's in a chopper crash or an IED, the loss of life is sad.

Iraqi Transition Plan

Q. What plans do you have for security after the new transition plan is implemented, after the Iraqi sovereignty is granted? How do you ensure—

The President. Well, it depends on what's taking place on the ground. Somebody told me, they said, "Well, this means there's going to be less troops." Politics is going to go forward. The political process will move on. And we'll adjust our troop level according to the security situation in Iraq.

Yes. Who are you with, first of all? I haven't seen—

Q. Fox News Channel.

The President. Very good. Welcome.

Protests During President's Upcoming Visit to the United Kingdom

Q. Are you concerned at all about the protests that you're going to be facing in London when you go?

The President. No, I'm not concerned at all. I'm glad to be going to a free country where people are allowed to protest. Not the least bit.

Yes, who are you with?

Q. I'm with CNN.

The President. Good.

Iraq

Q. Do you see the use of surface-to-air missiles as an escalation in the conflict in Iraq?

The President. It's symptomatic of the fact that there was a lot of weapons lying around. And we've just got to bring these killers to justice, which we will. The military is adjusting. You've been reading about the fact that they're adjusting their strategy and their plans. That's exactly what the Commander in Chief expects, flexibility on

the ground to change response to a change of tactics with the enemy.

Hillman [G. Robert Hillman, Dallas Morning News].

President's Upcoming Visit to the United Kingdom

Q. Yes, are you concerned at all with your visit to London, that it comes at a kind of uncomfortable time in some respects for Prime Minister Blair—

The President. No, I'm not concerned about my trip to London. I'm really looking forward to it. It's the second "are you concerned" question about my trip to England. I'm really looking forward to it. It's going to be a fantastic experience. I know you—do you have something else on the "concerned" question there? I cut you off. I beg your pardon.

Q. No, there have just been, you know, immense speculation that this is coming at an awkward political time for you and the Prime Minister, for that matter.

The President. Awkward political time for me?

Q. [Inaudible]—the situation in Iraq.

The President. No, I'm looking forward to the trip. I'm honored to have been invited. I look forward to my consultations with Tony Blair. We visit all the time via telephone or via secure video link. I'm looking forward to sitting down with him in person. It's going to be a great trip.

I guess—everywhere—every time I go somewhere, there is immense speculation. I'm not suggesting you're the speculators, but I remember before I went to the Far East, there was some speculation about this and speculation about that. No, I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be a great trip.

Yes, sir.

Steel Tariffs

Q. Mr. President, are you any closer to a decision on steel?

The President. Than I was Friday?

Q. Yes.

The President. Well, if there is a date at which I'm going to make it, I guess I'm 2 days closer. But no, I'm thinking about it. I've got some considerations. People are presenting reports to me, which I will look at, and let you know at the appropriate time, when I make up my mind.

Yes, sir. Who—

Q. NBC News.

The President. Very good.

Medicare Reform Legislation

Q. Okay, thank you. Mr. President, what do you think the chances are of getting the Medicare bill passed?

The President. The what? Medicare? You know, that's a good question. I think it's good. I think—I'm pleased we've come this far. And I think there's going to be immense pressure on Members of both the House and the Senate to support this bill. It is a good piece of legislation. It is a complex piece of legislation. After all, we're changing a Medicare system that has been stuck in the past for a long period of time.

I'm beginning to get a sense of the supporters for this piece of legislation. And there's some mighty active groups of people who are interested in good health care for our seniors that are getting mobilized, and so I think we've got a good chance of passing it. I know I will be actively pushing the bill, because it conforms to the principles I laid out of prescription drugs for our seniors, choice for seniors, accountability for the Medicare plan. There's a lot of good features in this bill. I look forward to working to see its passage.

Listen, you all have a wonderful Sunday. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:51 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.